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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Review of the methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women in the context of integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, in which the Assembly requested each functional commission to examine its methods of work in order to better pursue the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits. The report reviews the methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, particularly to enhance the implementation and follow-up of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, as well as to contribute to the implementation and follow-up of other major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields. The report concludes with recommendations for further improving the methods of work of the Commission.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, entitled "Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields", adopted on 23 June 2003. In paragraph 46 of that resolution the Assembly requested each functional commission

> "to examine its methods of work in order to better pursue the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits, recognizing that there is no need for a uniform approach since each functional commission has its own specificity, ... on the basis of a report with recommendations to be submitted by the Secretary-General to each functional commission ...; the functional commissions and other relevant bodies of the Economic and Social Council should report to the Council no later than 2005 on the outcome of this examination".

II. Mandates and terms of reference of the Commission on the Status of Women

A. Mandates prior to the Fourth World Conference on Women

2. The Commission on the Status of Women was established as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council in 1946, by Council resolution 11 (II) of 21 June 1946. In accordance with that resolution and the modifications made in paragraph 1 of Council resolution 48 (IV) of 29 March 1947,

> "The functions of the Commission shall be to prepare recommendations and reports to the Economic and Social Council on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields. The Commission shall also make recommendations to the Council on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights with the object of implementing the principle that men and women shall have equal rights, and to develop proposals to give effect to such recommendations".

3. Following a review of the role of the Commission in 1987, the Economic and Social Council, in paragraph 1 of its resolution 1987/22 of 26 May 1987, expanded the mandate of the Commission to "include the functions of promoting the objectives of equality, development and peace, monitoring the implementation of measures for the advancement of women, and reviewing and appraising progress made at the national, subregional, regional, sectoral and global levels".

B. Follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

4. Following the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995, the General Assembly, in paragraph 24 of its resolution 50/203 of 22 December 1995, invited the Economic and Social Council "to review and strengthen the mandate of the Commission on the Status of Women, taking into account the Platform for Action as

well as the need for synergy with all other related commissions and conference follow-up, and for a system-wide approach to its implementation". The General Assembly decided in paragraph 25 of that resolution that "the Commission on the Status of Women, as a functional commission assisting the Economic and Social Council, shall have a central role in the monitoring of the implementation of the Platform for Action within the United Nations system and in advising the Council thereon". The Assembly also decided, in paragraph 21 of the resolution, that the Commission, together with the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, would constitute a three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism that would play the primary role in the overall policy-making and follow-up, and in coordinating the implementation and monitoring of the Platform for Action, reaffirming the need for a coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the results of major international conferences in the economic, social and related fields.

5. In paragraph 27 of its resolution 50/203, the General Assembly requested the Commission on the Status of Women

> "to develop its multi-year programme of work for the period 1996-2000 at its fortieth session so that it can review the critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action and to consider how it could integrate into its programme of work the follow-up to the Conference and how it could develop its catalytic role in mainstreaming a gender perspective in United Nations activities, taking into account the need for a focused and thematic approach to the review of the Platform for Action and the contribution that can be made by all other functional commissions of the Council".

6. In its agreed conclusions 1996/1, on methods of work for dealing with the implementation of the Platform for Action, the Commission agreed to strengthen its cooperation with other relevant bodies of the United Nations system, including other functional commissions and their respective secretariats, and to monitor progress on the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, in order to strengthen its capacity to act as a catalyst in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the work of the United Nations system, to identify emerging issues, trends and new approaches affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men, and to review and appraise progress achieved and problems encountered in implementation of critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action.

7. At its forty-third session, on 22 July 1996, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 1996/6, which contained the multi-year programme of work for the Commission for 1997-2000. In section I, paragraph 1, of that resolution, the Council decided that the Commission should have a catalytic role in mainstreaming a gender perspective into policies and programmes. In section II, paragraph 2, the Council decided that

> "The Commission shall
>
> "(a) Assist the Council in monitoring, reviewing and appraising progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at all levels, and shall advise the Council thereon;

"(b) Continue to ensure support for mainstreaming a gender perspective in United Nations activities and develop further its catalytic role in this regard in other areas;

"(c) Identify issues where United Nations system-wide coordination needs to be improved in order to assist the Council in its coordination function;

"(d) Identify emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men that require urgent consideration and make substantive recommendations thereon;

"(e) Maintain and enhance public awareness and support for the implementation of the Platform for Action."

8. In paragraph 1 of its resolution 2001/4 of 24 July 2001, the Council adopted a multi-year work programme for the period 2002-2006, and in paragraph 2 decided that

"the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, as set out in the programme of work, shall be closely related to its mandate and to the relevant provisions of the Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session, with a view to ensuring their effective implementation through more practical and action-oriented initiatives and outcomes. To achieve effective implementation, the work of the Commission should take into account relevant cross-cutting issues, such as institutional capacity-building".

III. Working methods of the Commission on the Status of Women: enhancement of the follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

9. The General Assembly, in paragraph 47 of its resolution 57/270 B, underscored that "the functional commissions, when mandated, should continue to have the primary responsibility for the review and assessment of progress made in implementing United Nations conference documents, while taking on a new focus on their methods of work".

10. The Commission on the Status of Women has continually reviewed and revised its methods of work to allow it to assume its role as the central intergovernmental body responsible for follow-up to United Nations world conferences on women, including most recently the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (2000).

11. Innovations in relation to the working methods of the Commission have been introduced over the past decade and are outlined below.

A. Multi-year programme of work

12. Since 1987 (see Economic and Social Council resolution 1987/24 of 26 May 1987), the Commission has developed multi-year programmes of work on the basis of selected priority themes. In 1987, the Council endorsed the priority themes for the following five sessions of the Commission, with the first priority theme being considered by the Commission at its thirty-second session, in 1988.

13. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46 of 31 July 1998, annex II, paragraph 2, the Commission developed its most recent multi-year work programme for 2002-2006. The increased focus in the 1990s on integrated and coordinated follow-up to global conferences and summits has influenced the development of the multi-year programmes of work of the Commission.

B. Panel discussions and round tables

14. Panel discussions were initiated in the Commission on the Status of Women in 1997 as a response to agreed conclusions 1996/1, adopted at its fortieth session, on methods of work for dealing with the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women. The panels for each of the thematic issues examined by the Commission in the context of the multi-year programme of work should include experts appointed by the Secretary-General, experts working within the United Nations system and experts from Governments and from civil society in accordance with paragraph 6 of those agreed conclusions. Efforts have been made to strengthen the focus on implementation and to make the panels more interactive.

15. In accordance with paragraph (a) of its decision 46/101, the Commission organized for the first time a high-level round table during its forty-seventh session to provide an opportunity for dialogue and exchange of views and experiences among high-level representatives from capitals and to enhance the emphasis in the Commission on implementation and impact at the national level. The high-level round table focused on national experience in institutional capacity-building, in particular in relation to the two themes examined by the Commission at its forty-seventh session — media and information and communication technologies, and human rights of women and violence against women. During and following the high-level round table, Member States welcomed the Bureau's initiative and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share experiences in an interactive dialogue. The Bureau was encouraged to continue the practice of organizing high-level round tables and to investigate possible means of making them more interactive, including by providing clearer guidance on purpose and approach.

C. Election of the Bureau

16. The Council, in paragraph (a) of its decision 2002/234 of 24 July 2002, decided that the election of the Bureau would immediately follow the closure of the session of the Commission rather than take place at the beginning of the following session, in order to foster continuity and more effective preparatory processes.

D. Interaction with other functional commissions

17. Representatives of the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women have participated in a number of joint Bureau meetings organized by the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council. Most recently, the Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women attended the meeting of the chairpersons of the functional commissions with the Council on 17 July 2003, during the substantive session of the Council in Geneva. The focus of the panel was on means of increasing collaboration and interaction between the functional commissions.

18. Since 1998, the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women has annually participated in the work of and addressed the Commission on Human Rights. The results of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women of particular relevance to the work of the Commission on Human Rights, such as its adopted agreed conclusions, are transmitted to the Chairperson of the latter Commission for its attention (see E/2000/85). For the first time, during the forty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in 2003, the Chair of the Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights were invited to address the Commission on the Status of Women. Two teleconferences have been held by the Bureaux of the Commission on the Status of Women and of the Commission on Human Rights, on 16 November 1999 and 21 June 2001.

E. Gender mainstreaming

19. In response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/6, the Commission plays a catalytic role in facilitating and monitoring gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes of the United Nations system. In its catalytic role for gender mainstreaming, the Commission has submitted its outcomes to other functional commissions and bodies of the United Nations system. For example, the agreed conclusions on women's participation in and access to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women, adopted at the forty-seventh session of the Commission, were submitted to the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003. The agreed conclusions on environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters and on eradicating poverty, including through the empowerment of women throughout their life cycle in a globalizing world, adopted at the forty-sixth session of the Commission, were submitted to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September 2002, and to the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey from 18 to 22 March 2002, respectively. The agreed conclusions on gender and all forms of discrimination, in particular racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, adopted at the forty-fifth session of the Commission, were submitted to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban from 31 August to 7 September 2001.

IV. Recommendations for future development of the working methods of the Commission on the Status of Women

20. **The following recommendations are proposed for submission by the Commission on the Status of Women to the Economic and Social Council, to enhance and improve the working methods of the Commission in the context of integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields:**

(a) **The Commission may wish to further develop its focus on implementation and practical outcomes and develop means to ensure that the outcomes of its examination of thematic issues, in follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, contain significant policy developments and concrete recommendations for action;**

(b) **The Commission could enhance its focus on interactive and action-oriented expert panel discussions and high-level round tables to facilitate increased implementation of policy recommendations at the national, regional and global levels;**

(c) **In the context of the development of a future multi-year programme of work (the current multi-year work programme covers 2002-2006), the Commission may wish to develop ways and means to more effectively incorporate emerging issues, which need to be introduced on an ad hoc basis. This is important both for ensuring adequate attention to critical issues that are not envisaged in the adopted programme of work and for supporting the catalytic work on gender mainstreaming by allowing the Commission to more effectively contribute to the work programmes of other functional commissions and entities of the United Nations system;**

(d) **The Commission should develop ways to ensure a close linkage between the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, to ensure full integration of gender perspectives, and should also consider ways to contribute to the development of the major event proposed in paragraph 75 of General Assembly resolution 57/270 B;**

(e) **The Commission should further develop approaches to strengthen the linkages with other functional commissions, including through increased collaboration with the bureaux and substantive secretariats, particularly in the context of integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields. The Commission should follow, in particular, developments relating to working methods within other functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, in accordance with paragraph 46 of General Assembly resolution 57/270 B;**

(f) **In accordance with paragraph 52 of General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, in which the Assembly invited "the United Nations regional commissions in collaboration with other regional and subregional organizations**

and processes, as appropriate, to contribute, within their mandates, to the review of progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits", the Commission may wish to develop ways and means of increasing the contributions of the regional commissions in the work of the Commission, and in particular in the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, during its forty-ninth session;

(g) Pursuant to paragraph 48 of General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, in which the Assembly invited "the functional commissions to consider, in their deliberations, the experience gained and lessons learned by the United Nations funds and programmes in the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits", the Commission may wish to develop ways and means to encourage increased involvement by the entities of the United Nations system, particularly to enhance its catalytic and monitoring focus on gender mainstreaming;

(h) In accordance with paragraph 72 of General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, in which the Assembly underscored the importance of United Nations conferences and summits in "raising awareness, mobilizing political will and public opinion, engaging civil society and the private sector and for taking stock of the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits by all relevant stakeholders at all levels", the Commission may wish to encourage further active participation of all stakeholders in expert panel and round-table discussions in order to continue to enhance the exchange of good practices, lessons learned and obstacles encountered in the context of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document adopted by the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly;

(i) Innovative means of supporting and monitoring gender mainstreaming, particularly in the context of promoting integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields, should be sought.